

REMARKS

This application has been carefully reviewed in light of the Office Action dated May 3, 2005. Claims 66, 68, 70 and 76 are now pending in the application, with Claim 76 having been newly added. Claims 66, 68 and 70 are the independent claims herein. Reconsideration and further examination are respectfully requested.

Claims 66, 68 and 70 were rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a) over U.S. Patent No. 6,324,521 (Shiota). The rejections are respectfully traversed and the Examiner is requested to reconsider and withdraw the rejections in light of the following comments.

The present invention provides a requested item from one of a plurality of service providers. According to the invention, a request for the item from one of the service providers is transmitted by a user terminal to a service center. The service center refers to a second table which stores a group of service providers associated with at least one common item so as to determine a service provider for providing the requested item, and then refers to a first table which store prices of items. Based on the referral to the first table, the service center calculates a charge and provides the charge to the user terminal. Upon confirmation by the user terminal that the item is to be provided, the service center automatically transmits the request to a service provider, which produces the requested item according to the request. Thus, by storing items and their prices in the first table, and storing the group of service providers associated with at least one common item in a second table, the service center can determine which providers can produce the item and the cost to produce the item and can provide the same to the user terminal for confirmation.

Referring specifically to the claims, amended independent Claim 66 is a method of providing a plurality of services over a network, the method comprising the

steps of storing, by a service center, items and their prices in a first table, storing, by the service center, a group having a plurality of service providers associated with at least one common item in a second table, updating, by the service center, the prices of the items in the first table, requesting, by a user terminal, to the service center to provide an item from one of the plurality of the service providers, referring, by the service center, to the second table to determine service providers in a group associated with the requested item, referring to the updated first table on the basis of a result of referring to the second table, calculating a charge related to the request on the basis of a result of referring to the first table, sending a notification of the calculated charge from the service center to the user terminal, forwarding the request from the user terminal to one of the plurality of service providers via the network automatically upon a confirmation instruction from the user terminal of whether to provide the item, and performing, by the service provider, producing the item according to the forwarded request.

Amended independent Claim 68 is a system claim, and amended independent Claim 70 is a service center apparatus claim, each of which include features substantially corresponding to Claim 66.

The applied art is not seen to disclose or suggest the features of the present invention. In particular, the applied art is not seen to disclose or to suggest at least the feature of a service center storing items and their prices in a first table, and storing a group having a plurality of service providers associated with at least one common item in a second table, and then referring to the second and first tables to calculate a charge for a requested item and forwarding the request to a service provider upon confirmation of the request.

Shiota is merely seen to disclose a network photographic service in which a center server selects and assigns a laboratory for printing a picture in response to an order transferred from a customer so that the printing process can be carried out by the laboratory specified by the customer instead of the center server. See Shiota, Abstract; column 7, lines 3 to 45; and Figure 1. When the center server transmits the order information to the selected laboratory, it records the content of the order and calculates a data storage fee, a communication charge and the like to be paid to each laboratory by periodically summing up the amount of data transferred. See Shiota, column 9, lines 28 to 33. Thus, the operation of Shiota is wholly different from the present invention.

The Office Action refers to Claim 1 of Shiota and contends that Shiota discloses storing a group of service providers associated with at least one common item in a second table. However, Applicants disagree with the Office Action's contention since the relied upon portion of Claim 1 merely refers to a plurality of photo-finishing laboratories, which may be seen to correspond to a plurality of service providers, but which fails to disclose anything with regard to a group of service providers associated with at least one common item being stored in a second table.

The Office Action also contends that Shiota's disclosure of the claimed first and second tables is obvious because otherwise, how would Shiota be able calculate the price or know which providers provided services. However, Applicants fail to see anything which corresponds to the claimed invention. In this regard, one advantage of the present invention is storing the first table with prices of items, and then storing a second table of service providers associated with at one common item so that by updating the price of an item in the first table, all service providers associated with that common item will also be

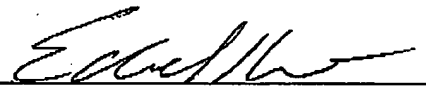
updated. That is, instead of storing prices of items in a table for each service provider (which appears to be the conventional way and the way of Shiota), the invention uses an association between the different tables to provide distinct advantages over the prior art. For example, while the Office Action contends that Shiota would obviously need to store prices of items in a table, and would obviously need to store a table with a plurality of service providers and their respective services, even if this were true, Applicants fail to see the claimed first *and* second tables of the present invention. Rather, given the Office Action's assumption, it can also readily be assumed that, in Shiota, information for each service provider is stored in table and would include individual costs for the services of that particular provider. Therefore, even if a plurality of providers can provide the same service (e.g., printing of a photograph), if the cost associated with printing by provider A is changed, there is nothing in Shiota that would also result in the same cost associated with printing by a provider B being updated because there simply is no association between the cost of printing (which would be stored in the first table of the invention) and both of providers A and B being included in a group with the same common item. Thus, Shiota would require a user to update the cost for printing in the table for both provider A and provider B because of the lack of the second table. Accordingly, Shiota fails to disclose the features of the invention.

Accordingly, based on the foregoing amendments and remarks, Claims 66, 68, 70 and 76 are believed to be allowable.

No other matters being raised, it is believed that the entire application is fully in condition for allowance, and such action is courteously solicited.

Applicants' undersigned attorney may be reached in our Costa Mesa, California office at (714) 540-8700. All correspondence should continue to be directed to our below-listed address.

Respectfully submitted,



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